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RICHARD ALEXANDER FULLERTON PENROSE,
M.D., LL.D.

(Read January 15, 1909.)

Richard Alexander Fullerton Penrose, son of the Honorable Charles Bingham Penrose and his wife, Valeria Fullerton Biddle, was born at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, the 24th of March, 1827. He was graduated in 1846 at Dickinson College, where he received also the degree of doctor of laws in 1872. After completing his college course, he entered the Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania, and graduated in 1849. From 1851 until 1853 he was resident physician at the Pennsylvania Hospital; in 1853 he became physician to the Southern Home for Children, and in 1854 consulting physician at the Philadelphia Hospital. He was one of those who secured the opening of the wards of the hospital for instruction. He delivered clinical lectures there on diseases of women and children. He also lectured on obstetrics in the Philadelphia School of Medicine, being associated with Da Costa, Agnew, Darrach and Hewson. In 1856 he was one of the founders of the Children's Hospital, and contributed to it time, energy and money. With Levick and Hunt he founded a successful and a very profitable quiz association.

In 1863 the trustees of the University of Pennsylvania elected him to the professorship of obstetrics and diseases of women and children, made vacant by the resignation of Dr. Hugh L. Hodge. He occupied the chair until 1889, when he voluntarily retired from the position, and at the same time gave up active practice.

It was as a medical teacher that Doctor Penrose was known. It was his life work. As he acquitted himself in his chosen field he should be judged. It is by this standard he himself would wish to be judged. In estimating his success we must remember the limitations imposed upon him. Medical education in America was in a stage of development so different in his time from the present that

it is difficult even for those of us who have witnessed its evolution, to realize its crudity and provincialism. Our medical schools were mainly proprietary institutions conducted for financial profit. Laboratory facilities, clinical material and individual instruction were either lacking altogether, as in the department of obstetrics, or were just beginning to be provided in the other two principal subjects of a medical course, medicine and surgery; but provided so inadequately that the student, obliged to go abroad to complete his education, could not justly be surprised at the contempt with which his medical diploma was regarded in Europe. The proprietors of our medical schools were quite satisfied that they had fulfilled their whole duty if they furnished a lecture room for a few hours a week to the teachers of the most important subjects in the course. The didactic lecture was the accepted method of medical teaching. Anything else that was offered was subordinate to it. These were the conditions in the very best of our schools and it was under these conditions that Dr. Penrose was obliged to teach. The only means at his command to prepare his students for their future responsibilities, was the didactic lecture. But of this means he availed himself with consummate ability.

It is no exaggeration to say that none of his contemporaries made his lectures at the same time so instructive, entertaining, amusing and useful. The most admirable quality of his art was the vivid and lasting impression made upon his auditors.

Much as we admired the skill, the operative dexterity, the sound judgment, and the great experience of Agnew, the profound erudition of Leidy, the brilliancy of William Pepper, all of Dr. Penrose's old students will bear me out in the assertion that today, twenty years at least, after they were given, we remember his lectures more distinctly than those of any of his colleagues.

In the swing of the pendulum from the old to the new methods our present tendency is perhaps to neglect the didactic lecture too much. It can be utilized with advantage still. The medical teacher of today could not do better than to study the methods of a man like Penrose who was obliged to concentrate all his ability on the only means of teaching at his command.

His personal dignity, penetrating but kindly voice, exquisitely

keen sense of humor, poetic fancy and eloquence were inimitable. But certain rules of the art might be learned by a study of Penrose's lectures. They were as carefully prepared as an actor studies his part. Emphasis, inflection, gesture and expression received scrupulously careful attention. A judicious admixture of the gay with the grave relieved the tedium of an hour's address. Each important point was brought out in bold relief, sometimes by a certain circumlocution in its introduction, often by an amusing anecdote, again by unexpected antitheses or apparent paradoxes and occasionally by moving his audience at one moment to roars of laughter and at the next to a hushed and solemn silence.

I cannot confine myself, Mr. President, to a cold analysis of Dr. Penrose's qualities as a medical teacher. Many of his fellow members in this venerable society were his personal friends and I am proud to be numbered among them. They must expect to hear, as I feel it my duty to pay, an inadequate tribute to the man himself. His oldest brother was described as the "kind and amiable Penrose." The description is equally applicable to the younger brother. He fairly radiated kindness. A harsh, unkind or ungenerous thought was absolutely foreign to his nature. He was affable, courteous, cordial to all degrees of men; but a consciousness of distinction in birth, connections and position gave him an innate dignity which forbade undue familiarity or lack of respect.

He had some odd and whimsical views on men and things, giving his conversation a fascinating piquancy. In one of his amiable foibles, he was like that most lovable character in fiction, Colonel Newcome. His friends were perfection itself. He could see no fault in them. His enthusiastic partisanship for people he liked reminds one of Essex endeavoring to secure the attorney generalship for his friend Bacon and saying to Sir Robert Cecil, "I will spend all my power, might, authority and amity, and with tooth and nail procure the same for him against whomsoever."

An incident in our association illustrates what I mean. He had determined to do all in his power to make me his successor. As the first step in that direction he told me to prepare a lecture as carefully as I could and to commit it to memory. When it was ready I was given a letter dated two days later, ostensibly received

just before his lecture hour, and reading, "I am unexpectedly detained. Please inform the class. If they care to stop and listen to you, you may use my hour." I was instructed to enter the room in apparent confusion, making the open letter in my hand tremble; to mount the rostrum and after giving the class Dr. Penrose's message, to say in a hesitating voice, "If you are willing to stay and hear me, I have a word or two to say on an interesting subject." "They will stop to hear you," said Doctor Penrose, "in the expectation of seeing you make an exhibition of yourself." His little plot was carried out exactly as he had planned it. My lecture was well received and Penrose was hugely delighted at its success.

I could give many more examples of characteristic kindnesses to younger men whom he befriended with a bounteous generosity that knew no stint.

There is no excuse for melancholy in contemplating such a death as Penrose's. Retiring in the full possession of his faculties and in the enjoyment of an enviable reputation; at an age when there was no premature retreat from the battle of life to an inglorious ease, but when he had earned the right to repose; followed into his retirement by the affectionate regard of hundreds of pupils in all parts of the world; living a score of years in tranquillity and peace; exceeding the allotted span of life by more than a decade; surrounded by devoted friends and a loving family, I can imagine no more dignified end of an honorable career. We can feel only the sadness with which we, who were left behind, might view the departure of a valued friend on a long and prosperous journey. When we leave this mortal ark behind and answer "Adsum" at our last roll call, may our survivors say of us, what we can say of our departed friend: "the sweetest canticle is *nunc dimittis*, when a man hath obtained worthy ends and expectations."

BARTON C. HIRST.